

## Watch and be Ready

Matt. 24:36-44

We have two contrasting statements made by our Lord in our passage. He said in verse 33, "So you also when you see all these things, know that it is near - at the doors!" Then, just a couple verses later in verse 36, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, but My Father only." So we need to think carefully about what Jesus said in order to avoid confusion. Jesus gave us three indicators of His coming and of the end of the age. The first, the preaching of the gospel in all the world as a witness to all the nations is a prophecy of gospel witness throughout the world that meets a standard of completeness that God has set. We do not know what God's standard of completeness is. Does it mean that every soul will have heard the gospel and had opportunity to respond, "yes" or "no" to salvation through Christ? Does it mean that every soul will have had a reasonable opportunity to hear the gospel if they had sought it? Does it mean that the work of translating the Scriptures into every language spoken on earth will have been completed? In fact, we will not be able to know ahead of time that the first indicator has been met. It will be the second indicator that will be clear and demonstrative that the prophetic clock (this generation will not pass away...) has started. Applying Jesus words of knowing and not knowing, of certainty and uncertainty to this context would seem to indicate that before the prophetic clock starts, "no one knows the day or the hour..." but that after the clock starts with the abomination of desolation then the Biblically informed will know that the time has come. We will not know before it is here but we will know when it is here. This interpretation makes sense of what otherwise would seem to be a contradiction.

Jesus next says, "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be..." Jesus knew that His listeners were well acquainted with the Genesis account of the flood. Facts about the flood that could extend to the "Coming of the Son of Man include: the complete rejection of God and His ways with the exception of Noah and his family, the comparative minority that Noah

represented as a man of God when compared with the vast majority that rejected God, the flood was a judgment upon the entire world, Methuselah died before the flood, Enoch was translated before the flood and Noah and family lived through the flood, when the waters of the flood receded Noah and family entered a new world with a new covenant between man and God. All of these observations are suggestive and they may all have significance but Jesus drew attention specifically to just one point of comparison between His coming and the days of the flood. "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark." This is not a description meant to condemn the wickedness of Noah's generation although that is also true. This statement is intended to point out that the people of Noah's day were oblivious to the immanent judgment that was about to fall. If you know that a disaster is near, then you do all you can to prepare.

I was the pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church in Corcoran, CA for a number of years. The town of Corcoran is built on very low land. The rivers that come down out of the Sierra Nevadas south of the San Joaquin River have no outlet to the sea. In the old days the rivers would end up in a lake bed called Tule Lake. Corcoran was built in the old Tule Lake basin. Tule Lake dried up because of siphoning off of all the run-off water for the irrigation of all the lower central valley farms. But, if the rains and snow melt amount to more than the available water storage capacity in any given winter, you get Tule Lake again and the City of Corcoran is looking at a flood. Last winter this is what happened. Suddenly, the homeowners in Corcoran were very anxious to buy flood insurance. And, the city had bulldozers building a new levy on the exposed side of town to prevent the flood waters from rolling in. Fortunately, the combination of circumstances that would have caused the flood did not happen. The city survived. But, when they thought a flood was likely they did everything possible to be prepared. This is human nature. But in the face of the most devastating flood that has ever occurred, the people of Noah's day did nothing to prepare. They "did not know until the flood came and took them all away."

Both the flood and the Coming of the Son of Man share in common a witness to what is to come. During the days before the flood, Noah spent 100 years building the ark. It was probably the biggest construction project of its time. It might have become a tourist attraction. It had an announced purpose which was to provide a means of escape from the coming flood. But, at that time the earth was watered by a mist rather than by rain and there had never been a flood of any size and so the people did not believe that they were in danger. Clearly, any observer would have noted that the project was nearing completion. The days when the animals showed up out of nowhere to board the ark should have signaled something to the general population but the "sign" was ignored. On the day the rains began to fall everyone woke up to expectations of life as always but it was not to be.

Peter warns "that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'" Peter goes on to make another comparison between the flood and Christ's coming. He notes that the flood was a judgment upon the world that caused the world to perish and that like the judgment of the flood there will be a judgment by fire "in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." Peter's recommendation in view of the judgment is, "Therefore since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells..."

Here is the thing. The ultimate demise of the world and all that is in it speaks just as importantly to every millennium, to every century, to every decade, to every year, to every month, and to every day as it will to the last of all of these. For those who are a part of the generation that will see the beginning of the end and the end of the end, only what's done for Christ will last. For those who have gone before us and whose lives ended in the natural way, that is they lived and died

before the end of time, only what's done for Christ will last. And for us, whether we belong to the first group or the second, only what's done for Christ will last.

We are mortal. There is no guarantee for any of us. We can hope for long life and most of us will probably experience that (even though we don't know what that means). But some of us will not. We do know that we are mortal. This is the first issue that we need to prepare for. Only what's done for Christ will last.